



Regional Workgroup
Coahuila-Nuevo León-Tamaulipas-Texas
(Four-State Regional Workgroup)

Meeting of the Amistad Task Force

Date: Tuesday, April 24, 2018
Time: 1:30 pm – 4:30 pm

Del Rio Civic Center
Mesquite Room
1915 Veterans Blvd.
Del Rio, TX 78840

Minutes

Summary of Participants: There were about 16 people at the event in Del Rio. Attendees included officials from the city of Del Rio, city of Eagle Pass, Environmental Security Program in Piedras Negras, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 6, Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT)—by phone, Secretariat of Environment in Coahuila (SEMA), North American Development Bank (NadBank)—by phone, Mexican Consulate offices in Del Rio and Eagle Pass, and academic institutions.

Victor Wong of TCEQ thanked the city of Del Rio for hosting the event and the North American Development Bank (NadBank) for providing the interpretation services.

Esmeralda Meza issued welcoming remarks on behalf of Mayor Robert Garza of Del Rio. The city of Del Rio recently celebrated its first international Earth Day Event. Meza thanked the ecology department of Acuña for participating at the event.

Dr. Carlos Rincon of the EPA Region 6 El Paso office issued welcoming remarks and asked Ms. Meza to provide him with a summary of the Earth Day Event for the EPA's border newsletter.

Alberto Perales of SEMARNAT Tamaulipas issued remarks on behalf of Delegate Macias. It is important to continue working on projects in the Border 2020 Action Plan.

Oscar Flores of the Secretariat of Environment in Coahuila (SEMA), Victor Ibarra of Piedras Negras, and the Mexican Consulate offices in Del Rio and Eagle Pass also issued remarks.

Isaak Ruiz issued remarks on behalf of Eagle Pass Mayor Ramsey English Cantu. He stressed the importance of promoting environmental awareness and education in schools.

It is important to join efforts to address binational environmental issues impacting our border area.

Wong provided an overview of the Border 2020 Program. He also discussed the current 2017-2018 Action Plan for the Amistad Task Force.

There are ten projects in the Action Plan—all the projects are from the Mexican side. There are three projects from Goal 1: Reduce Air Pollution (two are in progress and one is a new project).

There is one project in progress from Goal 2: Improve Access to Clean and Safe Water. There are six projects from Goal 3: Promote Materials Management, Waste Management and Clean Sites (four are in progress and two are finished). This document will be updated periodically.

Oscar Flores of the Secretariat of Environment in Coahuila (SEMA) discussed the Pro Aire Program.

Mexican law requires municipalities with over 500,000 residents to have an air quality monitoring system. SEMA obtained federal resources to install new equipment in Saltillo, Monclova and Piedras Negras. The municipio of Piedras Negras was included to exchange transboundary air quality data.

The National Institute of Ecology provided information on specific sites to capture data. The sites that were selected are available 24 hours. The equipment has operated for more than 13 months. We are measuring particles, Nitrogen Oxide and Ozone emissions.

We use air quality data from industry and regulated entities to identify emissions in the National Emissions Inventory. SEMA uses the Pollutant Release and Transfer Registry to include air quality reports from industry.

Pro Aire provides specific actions to reduce air emissions. It identifies a series of goals and strategies to fully develop each of the steps into concrete actions. There are 67 identified air basins in Mexico. In 2018, there are plans to address issues in 55 air basins through 26 Pro Aire state programs that are being developed.

SEMA is in the process of acquiring two mobile monitoring stations to measure emissions from the air basin of the coal region. It will consist of identifying a work plan and determining what steps are needed to address air quality issues in that region.

The development of Pro Aire consists of planning and drafting a document with goals and strategies. SEMA has already drafted a document and published it. Staff will begin a report for 2018 activities. A core committee made of municipalities, representatives of academia, health agencies, and state entities will work with technical staff on activities to improve air quality.

There were three regional workgroup meetings during the 2016-2017 period. The meetings were useful in drafting and publishing a document. The digital version is on SEMA's webpage, where you can find more than 110 concrete actions to address air quality.

SEMA assisted entities in developing a methodology workshop and creating a core Pro Aire committee. Flores mentioned that information was based on the 2014 state emissions inventory for Pro Aire. He also said that the 2016 state emissions inventory is in the process of being published.

Federal authorities are responsible for health issues related to air quality; the state is responsible for issues related to environmental contingencies; and municipalities work with academia and the private sector to support some of the technical requirements of Pro Aire.

SEMARNAT, The Secretariat of Environment in Coahuila (SEMA), the Coahuila transportation agency, and the municipalities of Acuña and Piedras Negras are part of the core committee. We used a bottom-up approach to identify each of the strategies.

Flores discussed how the document was developed. It also contains an executive summary and general information on the air zone. We obtained data results from an air quality assessment that was conducted within a period of six to eight months. We were also able to identify health impacts based on the assessment. The document also identifies funding sources in case of a contingency.

The publication contains 19 steps, six strategies and 110 actions. There are specific actions on how we are going to improve the air quality program in the state, identify benefits, goals and concrete actions, and a cost analysis.

The federal and state entities are responsible of enforcing regulations of stationary air sources. SEMA will create a state regulation to reduce and mitigate dust particles from rock-crushing operations.

Pro Aire also identifies best practices related to conservation of energy sources and targets emissions from different industries, such as the metal and foundry sector. Municipalities have vehicle inspection programs that target vehicle emissions. We have also identified specific areas where potential outdoor burning could occur.

We are working with hospitals and physicians to exchange data on illnesses associated with air quality. If we see that there is an increase of cardio respiratory illnesses in one specific area, we review the data with industry.

There is an air quality index that identifies levels of health concern by color (Green: Healthy, Yellow: Moderate, and Red/Purple: Unhealthy). If we see that air quality has reached unhealthy levels, we notify the public to avoid doing any outdoor activities and not take children to schools. We haven't seen this type of level yet, but we are prepared in case of a contingency.

Our air quality levels are regularly green, with some yellow peaks in certain areas. We will see shale gas exploration in the state very soon. It will certainly increase emissions for these areas. SEMA is in the process of acquiring mobile stations to measure emissions from potential shale sites.

Dr. Rincon asked about strategies to sustain the air quality monitoring network. We also need to identify specific actions for the Amistad region. Flores mentioned that SEMA is working with the Piedras Negras environmental security program and the Technological Institute in Piedras Negras to manage the monitoring station in Piedras Negras. We are analyzing potential funding sources for operation and maintenance costs.

It is important to work with neighboring states to exchange air quality data. SEMA staff will attend the TCEQ Environmental Trade Fair to learn about air quality data.

Are there any strategies in place to mitigate emissions from gas shale operations? There is an environmental impact study by SEMARNAT that identifies the type of emissions generated and strategies to reduce these pollutants. The inspection of gas shale facilities is under federal jurisdiction. SEMA will monitor levels in case of any peaks in the air quality index.

Dr. Luis Camacho of the Autonomous University of Coahuila (UAC) discussed an air quality monitoring study in the Coahuila coal region.

SEMARNAT and SEMA are doing great work to address air quality issues, but it is also important to identify sources using isotopes. The goal of the study is to identify the source of pollutants that impact air quality within an area of 100 km in urban zones in Mexico and South Texas. This process would help SEMA address those specific pollutants based on a scientific study.

The objectives are to identify potential pollution sources using isotope analysis, build an atmospheric model focusing on the toxicity of each pollutant, assess their environmental impact, and inform the authorities and public of the results. We are proposing a strategic contingency plan when these sources are reported.

The project consists of monitoring and characterizing pollutants from coal and thermoelectric plants in the region. We will use equipment to monitor isotopes from gas sources. There are

issues with flaring in the Eagle Ford Shale. We can use a drone equipped with a device to measure emissions from these sources.

It would take air samples within a range of 2 to 3 km in the same location for a year. This would help us to analyze isotopic measurements and identify the type of pollutants in the air. We can then notify industry of the specific sources that are released from their facilities.

UAC is seeking funding from CONACYT (Mexico's national council on science and technology) and CENER (National Renewable Energy Center) to conduct monitoring for a year and add isotopic measurements to graph charts. We will generate basin models to identify isotopes for each of the pollutants and how they are moving.

We can identify the concentration and dissipation of specific sources using isotopes. We want to develop a project that we can present to state authorities, so that they can conduct inspections of air emission sources.

We need to inquire with PROFEPA (Mexico's environmental enforcement agency) about their inspection guidelines for plants in the coal region.

Jorge Hernandez of the North American Development Bank (NadBank) gave an update on the projects funded by the Border 2020 Program.

There is one project funded in the Amistad area. It is a project from the Carolina university in Saltillo. A technical agreement is in the process of being signed by the academic institution and NadBank. The contract is expected to be signed in two weeks.

The project consists of developing a green infrastructure guide and organizing workshops on urban planning in Ciudad Acuña.

The Mexican Consulate in Del Rio hosted a meeting with officials of Acuña and Del Rio and academic institutions last week. The objective of the meeting was to present a project to reduce and prevent disasters in Acuña and Del Rio.

Victor Ibarra discussed the activities of the Piedras Negras's environmental education program in the community.

The municipio started a program to recycle plastic, aluminum, tires and used electronics in exchange for food items like milk and eggs. Residents would collect recyclable items for groceries. We also collected more than 2,700 scrap tires for goods in January and 3,000 tires in April.

Staff visited schools to promote environmental awareness. We taught more than 1,200 middle school students about recycling and conservation, and did outreach in elementary schools. Our staff is doing reforestation projects in schools.

Piedras Negras organized an art recycling contest. There were more than 225 entries in the contest, with more than 143 entries submitted from elementary and middle schools. Prizes were awarded to the winning entries. The contest ended in April.

Piedras Negras will organize the second environmental symposium in May. Ibarra will invite SEMA to discuss the Pro Aire Program at the event.

We will update the 2017-2018 action plan and add the Border 2020 funded projects to the document. It is important to get input from municipalities and counties about some of their projects that we could incorporate in the upcoming 2019-2020 action plan. There were closing remarks from officials.